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SUBJECT: SERBIA: HELICOPTER CONTRIBUTION TO UNAMID

REF: STATE 129518

Summary

¶1. (U) Response to reftel demarche and information request (see paragraph 4).

¶2. (SBU) Charge met with MFA Political Director Borko Stefanovic on December 22 and with Assistant Minister Zoran Vujic to discuss reftel request for a Serbian contribution to the UN/AU Mission in Darfur (UNAMID). Charge stressed that this was an opportunity for Serbia to showcase its regional leadership role and assist with an important UN Mission. Both Stefanovic and Vujic were uncertain if Serbia had enough operating helicopters and recommended we speak to the Minister of Defense.

¶3. (SBU) Charge and Embassy DATT met with Minister of Defense Dragan Sutanovac December 28. Sutanovac replied that the Serbian Armed Forces (SAF) did not have enough operational helicopters available to meet this request. He noted the SAF only had three or four operational helicopters at this time. While he expressed interest in assisting he stated he could not send these aircraft abroad and leave the country without operational helo lift in the event of an emergency. (Note: The helicopters are an important component of SAF's disaster management assistance to civil authorities.)

¶4. (SBU) Sutanovac further stated the Ministry of Defense had plans to refurbish some of the Mi-8 helicopters in its inventory to bring them back to operational standards; however, the Ministry did not have the resources available to accomplish this task in the foreseeable future. If funds became available from the UN in the future, Serbia would be willing to send those on such a mission, Sutanovac added. Post requests information on possible funding for such a project.

BRUSH